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Economic and Social Council

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Commission for Social Development
Thirty-sixth session
10-20 February 1998
Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups

Statement submitted by the International Movement ATD Fourth World, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* * *

In this year dedicated to extreme poverty and human rights, the call by the Expert Workshop on Participation and Social Justice for development founded on human rights is essential. This call must be heeded more and more widely, with particular attention to the final report on human rights and extreme poverty, submitted by the special rapporteur to the subcommission of the Commission on Human Rights (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1996/13). The report followed up on the address in 1987 by the late Joseph Wresinski, founder of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, before the Commission on Human Rights, calling for recognition of the poorest as defenders of human rights.

I. Reducing the vulnerability of the poorest

To the definition of vulnerability offered in the report of the Expert Workshop on Ways and Means to Enhance Social Protection and Reduce Vulnerability, the International Movement ATD Fourth World would add two points:

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(a) Extreme poverty makes the family unit terribly vulnerable. While the vulnerability of children fending for themselves is recognized, there must be greater understanding of how deep poverty robs parents of the chance to nurture their own children. Too often, parents who have shown nothing but love for their children are driven from them by the harshness of their lives. Too often, fathers desperate to provide for their families have no choice but to depart. What renders the poorest families so defenceless is the complete breakdown of their human rights. People living in extreme poverty are rarely regarded as members of families but rather as individuals with specific problems and concerns. Solutions are proposed to individuals. And yet the interdependence of the family unit must be respected;

(b) The vulnerability of the poor is the negation of their right to contribute freely to humanity's riches. Reducing their vulnerability requires restoring their rights and ensuring that they have the means to exercise those rights in order to assume their responsibilities. We must abolish the periods of unemployment of the most disadvantaged among workers, by transforming them into "sabbatical times geared to human and cultural progress, times of widely scoped training, including political and religious participation as well as artistic creation", as Joseph Wresinski argued in a working document submitted by the International Movement ATD Fourth World to the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 1995.

II. Enhancing social protection

In resolution 51/178, on the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, the General Assembly "stresses that ... people living in poverty and their organizations should be empowered by being fully involved in the setting of targets and in the design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of national strategies ... for poverty eradication ..., ensuring that such programmes reflect their priorities". This means that development programmes and strategies for poverty eradication must endure long enough to give hope to the most abandoned people, to enable them to overcome the difficulties inherited from the extreme deprivation that has often been passed on by several generations, and to learn lessons of humanity from them. The more intense and lasting extreme poverty is, the greater the human investment necessary to conquer it.

As a mother living in a shanty said, "We need so much courage, but we will have it because you believe in us. If we fall on our faces, it will be the same for you, because you are with us."

Joseph Wresinski noted that families whose self-confidence had been undermined could not offer faith in life to their children. The poorest families needed the fellowship of other people coming to share their own faith in the future, ... people investing the best of themselves, men and women who would not abandon people after a few years of technical assistance only. The investment of one human being in another was also about learning from the poorest, those who survived only when their own strength enabled them to and who had so much to teach society about fighting exclusion.

III. Partnership with the poorest as the path towards social justice

To strengthen social cohesion, social groups and institutions must move beyond participation to equal partnership with the most underprivileged. The essential conditions of such an equal partnership with the most disadvantaged are: a profound knowledge and

understanding of their daily efforts and aspirations for the future; believe and trust in them; access for them to culture, to ways of imparting their own knowledge and of enriching it through access to other forms of knowledge, and to ways of becoming essential contributors to the future development and progress of our societies and our world.

IV. Rethinking human activity

Ten years ago, Joseph Wresinski called for sharing, not just working time, but also time as a whole and of each person's skills so that the "abnormally accelerated" time of some can converge with the "abnormally slowed" time of others to create a unit of time shared by all. He launched a three-fold challenge for the reorganization of human activity:

(a) To guarantee access for all to the labour market where they can be useful for significant periods of time and work in freedom and dignity;

(b) To guarantee all persons the possibility of being creative and useful at times when they are not employed and to enable the most underprivileged to make those times opportunities for acquiring a universal culture ..., a period for human and cultural advancement through the widest possible training, including trade union, political and religious involvement, and artistic creativity;

(c) To guarantee a fair balance, in the life of every person, of time spent in and out of work.

He called for significant measures to be taken to ensure that the right to employment and culture were irreversibly enshrined in the duties of the State.

The International Movement ATD Fourth World is confident that the member States will continue to pursue the fulfilment of the commitments made at the World Summit so that families mired in poverty may indeed exercise the rights and share the responsibilities which enable them to contribute to the well-being of humankind. Pursuing the essential condition of full partnership with the poorest throughout the world is the path towards social justice, democracy and peace for the generations to come.

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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups

Statement submitted by the Baha'i International Community, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

• • •

Non-governmental organizations at all levels have been and remain important actors in support of families. Governments also play a crucial role in this regard, and their active partnership with civil society and the private sector is imperative.

Yet, support of the family is a complex process. Although the family is accepted as the biological and social core of civilization, it is easier to consider its component parts rather than to support "family" as an entity in both international agreements and national policy. Consequently, many conventions and resolutions on women, children, and certain other groups have been developed, but little has been produced on the family itself.

Throughout the world the very existence of people and families is threatened by poverty. Since there is a greater disparity between rich and poor, it is necessary, more than ever, for Governments to be proactive in the protection and support of poor families. Despite commitments for the eradication of poverty by the year 2000, the effects of poverty have

* E/CN.5/1998/1.

** On behalf of the following non-governmental organizations: Baha'i International Community, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, International Council of Women, International Federation on Ageing, International Federation for Home Economics, Soroptimist International, World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations, World Information Transfer, World Movement of Mothers and World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations.

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become increasingly devastating. According to United Nations statistics, more than 1 billion people were living in poverty in 1993. These people live in families and, in developing countries, millions of families lack access to the necessities of life.

The Baha'i International Community and the other non-governmental organizations associated with the New York NGO Committee on the Family are particularly concerned by the lack of visibility of "family" as an issue during the deliberations of the Commission for Social Development. Because of the integrating nature of the family in its social context, with respect to the focus on individual members and groups, all of the themes before the Commission involve the family both as a partner in sustainable development and social integration and as an institution in need of strengthening and support. With this concern in mind, we, therefore, offer the following recommendations for consideration by the Commission, to be included in any agreed conclusions issuing from the current session:

(a) The United Nations Secretariat should be asked to prepare a report for the Commission at its thirty-eighth session on whether national family structures are accurately reflected in social policies and programmes;

(b) Governments should be asked to undertake the social impact assessments recommended in the report of the Workshop on Ways and Means to Enhance Social Protection and Reduce Vulnerability, with particular focus on the impact of draft legislation policies, programmes etc. on the well-being of families, with the purpose of creating a proactive preventive approach to risk management and reduction of vulnerability.

To summarize, the protection of the family and the promotion of its well-being must become central to community processes. The family is the primary institution of society and the principal incubator of values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. When it is spiritually, physically, economically and psychologically healthy, the family contributes significantly to the development of responsible citizens of communities and nations. It is with this concept as a guiding principle that we would urge the Commission to carry out its mandates.

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Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: Priority theme: "Promoting social integration and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons"

Statement submitted by Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council of North and South America; Help Age International; International Council of Women; International Federation of Business and Professional Women; International Federation on Ageing; International Union of Family Organizations; Soroptimist International; Zonta International (general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council); All India Women's Conference; Associated Country Women of the World; Caritas Internationalis; Foundation for the Rights of the Family; International Catholic Child Bureau; International Confederation of Christian Family Movements; International Council of Jewish Women; International Council on Alcohol and Addictions; International Federation for Home Economics; International Federation of University Women; International Kolping Society; Italian Centre of Solidarity; Medical Women's International Association; New Humanity; Pax Romana; SOS-Kinderdorf International; World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts; World

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consolidation of a process of globalization that would widen the gulf between the information rich and the information poor, and that would have profound negative implications for equitable and sustainable social development.

Information and communication technologies are the primary enabling mechanisms for economic globalization, a process that is very rapidly being translated into binding and legally enforceable international agreements – agreements that are being negotiated and entered into force with virtually no opportunity for public participation. As a result, the "constitution of a single global economy" – a phrase used by the Director of the World Trade Organization to describe the pending Multilateral Agreement on Investment – is being finalized in a context in which there is no framework that allows economic interests to be balanced with consideration of social – or environmental – concerns.[1] As it stands, the Multilateral Agreement would subject local and national Governments to legal obligations to protect corporate property interests against, *inter alia*, hypothetical loss of profits resulting from governmental policy as well as from economic loss caused by strife or social unrest and would override incompatible local and national laws and regulations.

There is widespread and growing concern in the non-governmental community, especially in developing countries, that the adoption of the Multilateral Agreement, in its present form, in May 1998, would lock into place a body of enforceable law that would, *inter alia*, undermine the implementation of the agreements arrived at in recent global conferences, including the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development.

Meanwhile, the use of information technology has been evolving as a key enabling mechanism in the development of global civil society, especially in the context of agreements of, and follow-up to, recent global conferences. Among examples of note to date has been the progressive development of a partnership-based online framework to enable monitoring and implementation of the Habitat Agenda (see http://unhabitat.org/partners) and follow-up to Agenda 21, where the NGO Steering Committee for the Commission on Sustainable Development called for identification of "critical information ecology issues" and for:

> "... the design and establishment of, and support for, participatory enabling environments – from community and interlocal networks to national and global frameworks – within which information and communications technologies, systems and processes – including traditional and non-electronic forms – can facilitate a transition to more open, equitable and sustainable communities and society".[2]

The urgency of that call is underscored by the present need to address the Multilateral Agreement before it is too late. There is an immediate need to institute consultations on the feasibility, design and implementation of broad-based information ecology processes and frameworks to facilitate public dialogue and deliberation on the implications of the Multilateral Agreement and to seek a forum in which its terms and conditions can be reconciled with the conditions that are needed for the implementation of the agreements of the Social Summit and of other recent global conferences. Such a forum could provide a historic opportunity for a millennial process of global agreement that could provide a foundation for sustainable and equitable human development.

These consultations should uphold a goal of enabling participation that is not subject to restrictions based on age, ability, gender, geographical location, or cultural, religious or political background. The consultation process could also fruitfully address the development of an integrated framework to enable the implementation of the global agreements – for example, along the lines of the Partnership, Informatics and Participation project of the NGO

Committee on Human Settlements,[3] as well as on the preparations for a Peoples Millennium Assembly and/or Non-Governmental Millennium forum, in response to the Secretary-General's invitation in his proposal "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform".[4]

Notes

[1] Information on the Multilateral Agreement on Investment is accessible on the World Wide Web at http //www infohabitat org/mai

[2] "Recommendations for action and commitments at Earth Summit II 4 4 Information ecology" (http //www infohabitat org/csd-97/ie html)

[3] See http //www infohabitat org/ngochs

[4] A/51/950 (http //www un org/reform/track2/initiate htm)

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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: Priority theme: "Promoting social integration and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons"

Statement submitted by Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council of North and South America; Help Age International; International Council of Women; International Federation of Business and Professional Women; International Federation on Ageing; International Union of Family Organizations; Soroptimist International; Zonta International (general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council); All India Women's Conference; Associated Country Women of the World; Caritas Internationalis; Foundation for the Rights of the Family; International Catholic Child Bureau; International Confederation of Christian Family Movements; International Council of Jewish Women; International Council on Alcohol and Addictions; International Federation for Home Economics; International Federation of University Women; International Kolping Society; Italian Centre of Solidarity; Medical Women's International Association; New Humanity; Pax Romana; SOS-Kinderdorf International;

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World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts; World Federation of Methodist Women; World Movement of Mothers; World Vision International (special consultative status with the Council); Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University; European Union of Women; International Association of Charities; International Council of Psychologists; International Inner Wheel; International Round Table for the Advancement of Counselling (Roster)

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* * *

We, the undersigned international non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, recall that:

The Heads of State and Government at the World Summit for Social Development stated that "the aim of social integration is to create a 'society for all' in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play";

The Heads of State, in the Copenhagen Declaration, while acknowledging that in different cultural, political and social systems, various forms of family exist, recognize that the family, as the basic unit of society, plays a key role in social development, that as such it should be strengthened, with attention to the rights, capabilities and responsibilities of its members, and that it is entitled to receive comprehensive protection and support; and that there is an urgent need for policies that strengthen the family and contribute to its stability;

The global conferences of the 1990s referred to the family in similar terms. For example, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development affirms that the introduction of children to the culture, values and norms of society begins in the family, and the International Conference on Population and Development focuses on "the family, its roles, rights, composition and structure".

We, therefore,

1. Congratulate the United Nations on the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in which the family was recognized for the first time as "the natural and fundamental group unit of society" and entitled to protection by society and the State.

2. Consider that social integration should be based on four main pillars: social justice, education, eradication of poverty, and respect for human dignity and cultural diversity. Therefore, social integration should also mean adequate recognition of and support for vulnerable and marginalized groups such as the poor, illiterate persons, minorities and ethnic groups discriminated against, refugees and migrants, and disabled persons, in order to enable them to participate fully in society.

3. Emphasize that social integration starts in the family and that it is within families and households that persons of different ages and genders interact for the common benefit, where children are reared, nurtured and socialized, where vulnerable members are supported and

taken care of. The family is the essential school for human rights education and for promoting gender equity; it acts as a buffer in cases of adversity, such as illness, unemployment and loneliness, and is a key factor to ensure the integration, social commitment and participation of children and youth. In order to support families in their social roles and functions, family interrelationships and the relationship between human rights and the family must be fully recognized.

4. Underline that social integration is an important factor for the satisfaction of older persons and a pre-condition for dignified ageing.

5. Ask for particular consideration to be given to the direct impingement on families of problems such as poverty, violence, drugs and alcohol dependence, inadequate housing and social services, and migration; and for the family dimension to be linked to issues such as development, social integration, the advancement of women and the responsible use of the environment.

6. Request that special attention be given to families in all countries suffering from great changes mainly due to social transition — among others, the Central and Eastern European countries.

7. Suggest that, in the formulation of family strategies and policies, due attention be given to the multiple responsibilities in family life and child-rearing, with particular emphasis on equal conditions for women and men and on the need to conciliate professional work and family obligations.

8. Wish that the very useful background papers of the two workshops on participation and social justice, organized by the United Nations Secretariat for the Commission, had given due consideration to the family and family-oriented non-governmental organizations as one of the main actors in civil society and as essential links between individuals and the State.

9. Urge that family-specific recommendations contained in international and national legislation and constitutions be fully implemented in all countries.

10. Suggest that the importance of the Subprogramme on the Family within the Division of Social Policy and Development be enhanced so as to encourage and facilitate the exchange of information on supportive policies for families, especially at the local level.

11. Ask that more technical assistance be afforded to the NGO Committees on the Family and that its involvement and active collaboration be recognized by the United Nations offices in New York, Paris and Vienna.

12. Request that the proposed programme of work on the Division for Social Policy and Development for the biennium 1998-1999 (E/CN.5/1997/L.2, 13 February 1997), submitted to the Commission for Social Development at its thirty-fifth session, also focus on the family dimension in the follow-up activities to the global conferences of the 1990s, particularly on the need to formulate family-sensitive policies and development.

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Statement submitted by Information Habitat: Where Information Lives, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* * *

Information technology, public participation and global agreements

As the information revolution gains momentum – a revolution widely acknowledged to be on the order of magnitude of the industrial revolution, it is critical that the Commission on Social Development and Member States identity ways and means to undertake timely, broad-based and systematic consultations to examine social and other implications and opportunities relating to the adoption and use of information technologies.

The new information technologies offer unprecedented opportunities for broad-based participation in governance at local, national and global levels as well as the possibilities of costs-effectiveness ease of access to public information. However, in the absence of timely public policy initiatives and in the context of rapidly growing adoption of the technologies governed almost exclusively by market forces, there are high risks of

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Federation of Methodist Women; World Movement of Mothers; World Vision International (special consultative status with the Council); Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University; European Union of Women; International Association of Charities; International Council of Psychologists; International Inner Wheel; International Round Table for the Advancement of Counselling (Roster)

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The Heads of State, in the Copenhagen Declaration, while acknowledging that in different cultural, political and social systems, various forms of family exist, recognize that the family, as the basic unit of society, plays a key role in social development, that as such it should be strengthened, with attention to the rights, capabilities and responsibilities of its members, and that it is entitled to receive comprehensive protection and support; and that there is an urgent need for policies that strengthen the family and contribute to its stability;

The global conferences of the 1990s referred to the family in similar terms. For example, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development affirms that the introduction of children to the culture, values and norms of society begins in the family, and the International Conference on Population and Development focuses on "the family, its roles, rights, composition and structure".

We, therefore,

1. Congratulate the United Nations on the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in which the family was recognized for the first time as "the natural and fundamental group unit of society" and entitled to protection by society and the State.

2. Consider that social integration should be based on four main pillars: social justice, education, eradication of poverty, and respect for human dignity and cultural diversity. Therefore, social integration should also mean adequate recognition of and support for vulnerable and marginalized groups such as the poor, illiterate persons, minorities and ethnic groups discriminated against, refugees and migrants, and disabled persons, in order to enable them to participate fully in society.

3. Emphasize that social integration starts in the family and that it is within families and households that persons of different ages and genders interact for the common benefit, where children are reared, nurtured and socialized, where vulnerable members are supported and taken care of. The family is the essential school for human rights education and for

promoting gender equity; it acts as a buffer in cases of adversity, such as illness, unemployment and loneliness, and is a key factor to ensure the integration, social commitment and participation of children and youth. In order to support families in their social roles and functions, family interrelationships and the relationship between human rights and the family must be fully recognized.

4. Underline that social integration is an important factor for the satisfaction of older persons and a pre-condition for dignified ageing.

5. Ask for particular consideration to be given to the direct impingement on families of problems such as poverty, violence, drugs and alcohol dependence, inadequate housing and social services, and migration; and for the family dimension to be linked to issues such as development, social integration, the advancement of women and the responsible use of the environment.

6. Request that special attention be given to families in all countries suffering from great changes mainly due to social transition — among others, the Central and Eastern European countries.

7. Suggest that, in the formulation of family strategies and policies, due attention be given to the multiple responsibilities in family life and child-rearing, with particular emphasis on equal conditions for women and men and on the need to conciliate professional work and family obligations.

8. Wish that the very useful background papers of the two workshops on participation and social justice, organized by the United Nations Secretariat for the Commission, had given due consideration to the family and family-oriented non-governmental organizations as one of the main actors in civil society and as essential links between individuals and the State.

9. Urge that family-specific recommendations contained in international and national legislation and constitutions be fully implemented in all countries.

10. Suggest that the importance of the Subprogramme on the Family within the Division of Social Policy and Development be enhanced so as to encourage and facilitate the exchange of information on supportive policies for families, especially at the local level.

11. Ask that more technical assistance be afforded to the NGO Committees on the Family and that its involvement and active collaboration be recognized by the United Nations offices in New York, Paris and Vienna.

12. Request that the proposed programme of work on the Division for Social Policy and Development for the biennium 1998-1999 (E/CN.5/1997/L.2, 13 February 1997), submitted to the Commission for Social Development at its thirty-fifth session, also focus on the family dimension in the follow-up activities to the global conferences of the 1990s, particularly on the need to formulate family-sensitive policies and development.

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The new information technologies offer unprecedented opportunities for broad-based participation in governance at local, national and global levels as well as the possibilities of costs-effectiveness ease of access to public information. However, in the absence of timely public policy initiatives and in the context of rapidly growing adoption of the technologies governed almost exclusively by market forces, there are high risks of

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> "... the design and establishment of, and support for, participatory enabling environments – from community and interlocal networks to national and global frameworks – within which information and communications technologies, systems and processes – including traditional and non-electronic forms – can facilitate a transition to more open, equitable and sustainable communities and society".[2]

The urgency of that call is underscored by the present need to address the Multilateral Agreement before it is too late. There is an immediate need to institute consultations on the feasibility, design and implementation of broad-based information ecology processes and frameworks to facilitate public dialogue and deliberation on the implications of the Multilateral Agreement and to seek a forum in which its terms and conditions can be reconciled with the conditions that are needed for the implementation of the agreements of the Social Summit and of other recent global conferences. Such a forum could provide a historic opportunity for a millennial process of global agreement that could provide a foundation for sustainable and equitable human development.

These consultations should uphold a goal of enabling participation that is not subject to restrictions based on age, ability, gender, geographical location, or cultural, religious or political background. The consultation process could also fruitfully address the development of an integrated framework to enable the implementation of the global agreements – for example, along the lines of the Partnership, Informatics and Participation project of the NGO

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[4] A/51/950 (http //www un org/reform/track2/initiate htm)